8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Lazy Boy, the oldest living Piegan a decade ago, followed this traditional custom in naming my younger daughter. He gave her the name Many-Steals-Horses-Woman, explaining that as a young man he had been very successful in capturing horses from enemy camps so he thought this name would bring her good fortune in whatever she tried to do.

Elaborate cradles were luxury items, uncommon among the Blackfeet a century ago. When walking or riding on horseback, women commonly carried their babies on their backs, inside their robes or blankets. The mother stood with her back bent, grasped the infant by both arms, swung it over her shoulders, then quickly drew her robe about her own body and that of the child. Blackfoot mothers nursed their babies until long after they were able to walk. Indeed, some mothers continued to nurse their children until they were five or six years old, believing this would prevent another pregnancy until their youngest child was old enough to look after himself.

Children were taught the elements of good manners and respect for their elders. They were expected to sit quietly while adults were talking in the tipi, to perform their chores promptly, to observe the taboos of the family medicine bundles, and to help the aged and show particular respect to them. They were taught to take teasing gracefully. But if a child of about their own age struck them, they were to fight back to the best of their ability.

The mother was responsible for the education of her daughters. The little girl began to learn about women's responsibilities by watching her mother and grandmothers at their tasks. She imitated their actions in her childhood play. She began to help her mother in such light tasks as picking berries, and graduated to the heavier work of digging roots and carrying firewood and water for the lodge. As the girl grew older, she received instructions in dressing hides, preparing foods, making clothing, and in the women's crafts of geometric painting, porcupine quillwork, and beadwork. A girl was expected to become proficient in these crafts before she married. At the annual sun dance mothers ex-

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[ca. 1850]

plained to their daughters the honor bestowed upon the medicine woman because she had always been true to her husband.

Girls dressed in garments which were miniatures of those worn by their mothers. But small boys often went nude in the summer. Or, at most, they wore only a breechclout in warm weather.

Blackfoot children were accustomed to horses from infancy. As babies they rode on their mothers' backs atop a horse when camp was moved. When they were able to sit up, they rode on the travois or on horseback behind their mothers. At an early age, usually by their fifth year, they were taught to ride alone. The child was lifted into a high-horned woman's saddle on a gentle horse, and rawhide ropes were passed back and forth between pommel and cantle on each side and tied to prevent the child's falling. A parent led the horse around the camp at a slow walk. If the child was afraid, he could hold on to the saddle horn. As he gained in experience and confidence, he was led at a faster pace and was taught to use the reins to control his mount. When camp was moved, the child was tied in the saddle and the horse was led by an adult. Soon he was riding alone. By the time most children were six or seven years old, they were good riders. Some rode little saddles made for them by fond mothers or grandmothers. They also learned to ride bareback and to ride double, and they frequently competed in impromptu horse races.

Fathers looked after the education of the boys, but they were allowed much more freedom than were girls. Boys were taught to make miniature bows and arrows. They were encouraged to take part in rough, active body- and character-building games and sports. At the sun dance encampment fathers pointed out to their sons the great warriors of their tribe and cited the honors that came to men who were brave and successful at the arts of war. The hero-worshiping youth was told again and again the stirring narratives of the outstanding fighting men of his tribe, both past and present. He was reminded of the old Blackfoot proverb, "It is better to die in battle than of old age or sickness."

Boys of about ten years of age were entrusted with the daily

ABOUT BABIES AND CHILDREN

864 My grandmothers didn't usually learn about childbirth until they were ready to have their first children. I was raised this way, too, and it is one of the things about our customs that I have never understood. As a young girl I used to ask my mother about having children. Either she would ignore me or she would say: "When the time comes, you'll find out about it." She was raised the same way, and so was her mother. My girl friends and I sometimes traded gossip and rumors about the subject, but we never really knew much about it. Some of the things we heard were good, and some were horrifying.

843 I still often hear of the stereotyped Indian mother who has her child alone, out in some field, and then comes back home and continues her work as if nothing happened. If there were Indians who did this, they were sure not my grandmothers. As soon as my grandmothers of the past knew that they were pregnant, they slowed down their work and began a disciplined period during which they were forbidden to do many things.

If it was a first pregnancy then the mother-to-be was given advice by an older woman with more experience, often a
881 sister-in-law or the mother-in-law. Some tribes had elaborate ceremonies for girls reaching puberty, but ours did not. Even
864 today a lot of girls in our tribe are really in the dark about having children. With the modern lack of discipline, this has created many problems.

843 If the husband of a pregnant woman could afford a second
[595] wife, he often got one at this time, to help out with the household. Otherwise he might ask a younger sister to move in and help—either his own or his wife's sister. If he had a widowed mother or aunt, she might come and do the work instead. His wife's mother was not eligible to help, since she was not allowed to be in the company of her son-in-law.

"If the children of a household didn't behave then the mother or father might go and get some old man or old lady to come and give them a lecture. If the kids were still acting bad that old person would just pull out an awl and pierce their ears right then. That worked very well in teaching kids a lesson.

"In my young days all the kids had their ears pierced for earrings, anyway—boys and girls. Usually this was done by some old lady, when we were still babies. Round pieces of shell were the most popular kind of earring decoration among us Bloods."

Because we spend a lot of time with our elders, my kids have learned from the start to have respect. Even today we get old people in our home who have certain rules that must be followed around them. When our grandfather was around, for instance, everyone had to stay seated while he was eating his food. The kids enjoy having the old people around because they get to hear a lot of stories and songs. Some of the children's songs have silly sayings in them, such as: "Magpie, magpie, go before me and stab your bag by the door"; or "Gopher, gopher, with bouncing breasts; with bouncing breasts; with bouncing breasts."

Sometimes the old person gets the kids to play a game, like pinching the tops of each other's hands and holding on to them until there is a big pile of hands. The first one that lets go gets tickled from the rest. The songs are called lullaby songs, and mothers used to sing them to their babies to put them to sleep. Kind of a scary one had these words: "Wolf, wolf, come eat this baby that won't go to sleep."

Little kids used to be left to play together, and in the summer they often went naked. But as soon as they got old enough to know the difference between boys and girls, they were separated. From then on the girls were watched carefully by their mothers and aunts, and no boys were allowed

near them. If they did anything that might bring a bad name to the family they were punished quite severely—mostly by their own brothers.

Brothers and sisters were taught to respect each other from an early age. Girls were never allowed to dress improperly in front of their brothers. Some of these customs have gone on to the present time, I can tell you. I was the only girl in my family, and I had six brothers who watched over me. These customs sure caused me and some of my friends a lot of tears and heartaches—like when we had boy friends of whom our brothers didn't approve, or when we wanted to be in style and wear shorter skirts.

In the days when my grandmothers were little girls about the only toys they had were small replicas of the things their mothers worked with—small tipis and camping outfits, dolls and little cradleboards, and miniature tools for tanning and cooking food. They were told about the holy women who put up Sun Dances, with the hopes that they would learn to be honest, kind, and virtuous.

I have often heard that the old Indians sold their daughters. There is some truth to this, but mostly it is a misunderstanding of our customs. When a worthy young man married a respectable girl, both families exchanged presents. However, to win the approval of her parents, the young man first had to show her parents how generous he could be by sending them several fine horses and other property. Since the parents were losing a good household worker in the transaction, these valuables could be looked upon as a return on their investment of having raised the daughter to her prime. I imagine some parents thought of the matter in these terms—especially fathers who had a number of sons. Keep in mind that the daughter's marriage meant she would then be obligated to her husband and his family. Often her parents hardly saw her anymore after the marriage.

The way that a young man first gave notice of his desire for